Australian Bureau of Statistics

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Quality Declaration

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Trend underemployment at 8.5%, below 2017 peak

The monthly trend unemployment rate remained steady at 5.5 per cent in May 2018, according to latest figures released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) today.

Over the year to May, the unemployment rate declined 0.2 per cent, while the underemployment rate also fell by 0.2 per cent over the year to 8.5 per cent. The underemployment rate, which is the proportion of people who are working but would like to work more hours, remains below the peak of 8.7 per cent seen in 2017.

"The latest data tells us that over the past year both the trend unemployment rate and underemployment rate declined by 0.2 per cent, resulting in the underutilisation rate declining 0.4 per cent to 13.9 per cent," the Chief Economist for the ABS, Bruce Hockman, said.

Employment and hours

Trend employment increased by around 16,000 persons in May 2018, with part-time employment increasing by 12,000 persons and full-time employment by 4,000 persons. This continued the recent slowing of employment growth, particularly full-time employment growth.

The net increase of 16,000 persons comprised of well over 300,000 people entering employment, and more than 300,000 leaving employment in the month.

The trend participation rate decreased by less than 0.1 per cent to 65.5 per cent in May 2018, after the April figure was revised down.

Over the past year, trend employment increased by 318,000 persons or 2.6 per cent, which was above the average year-on-year growth over the past 20 years (2.0 per cent).

The trend monthly hours worked increased by 2.8 million hours or 0.2 per cent in May 2018, and by 2.7 per cent over the past year.

States and Territories

Over the past year, the states and territories with the strongest annual growth in trend employment were New South Wales (3.6 per cent), Queensland (2.9 per cent) and South Australia (2.4 per cent).

Seasonally adjusted data

The seasonally adjusted number of persons employed increased by 12,000 persons in May

2018. The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate decreased to 5.4 per cent and the labour force participation rate decreased to 65.5 per cent.

More details are in the May 2018 issue of Labour Force, Australia (cat. no. 6202.0). In addition, further information, including regional labour market information, can be found in the upcoming May 2018 issue of Labour Force, Australia, Detailed - Electronic Delivery (cat. no. 6291.0.55.001), due for release on 21 June 2018. Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, Quarterly (cat. no. 6291.0.55.003), which includes employment by industry, is also due for release on 21 June.

These publications are available for free download (after release) from the ABS website: https://www.abs.gov.au.

Media note:

- When reporting ABS data, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) must be attributed as the source.
- For media requests and interviews, contact the ABS Communications and Partnerships Section on 1300 175 070 (8.30am - 5pm Monday - Friday AEST).
- The ABS produces trend estimates to provide a more reliable indicator of the underlying behaviour of the Labour Force series. Trend estimates were introduced into the Labour Force series in the mid 1980s and are available back to February 1978. Trend estimates are considered the best indicators of the underlying behaviour in the labour market. See paragraphs 28 to 37 of the Explanatory Notes in Labour Force, Australia (cat. no. 6202.0).
- In simple terms, the ABS defines ‘unemployment’ as persons who are not working, are actively looking for work and available to start work in the survey reference week. ‘Underemployment’ refers to people who are working but would like to be working more hours. ‘Underutilisation’ refers to the combined unemployed and underemployed populations. Information on other related groups (eg. ‘marginally attached’ people) can be found in Participation, Job Search and Mobility (cat. no. 6226.0), available annually in respect of February.
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